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CIA/OER/S-07169-74 COMMUNIST CONSERVATION OF ARTILLERY AMMUNIT-
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December 1974

MEMORANDUM

Communist Conservation of Artillery Ammunition

1. One noteworthy aspect of Communist ammunition expenditures in 1974 has been a reluctance on the part of the Communists to use their artillery. Even during the periodic highpoints and extended periods of heavy fighting in regionwide areas, firings of artillery ammunition have remained relatively low. This pattern of artillery fire has distinct implications for Communist military capabilities and tactical plans in South Vietnam.

2. A comparison of Communist expenditures of heavy weapons ammunition in 1974 with those during the 1972 offensive demonstrates dramatically that the Communists are conserving their artillery far more than their other heavy weapons.* During the first eleven months of 1974 Communist forces in South Vietnam reportedly expended an average of 680 rounds of mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle per day -- slightly less than the 730 rounds daily reportedly fired during the first six months (April through September) of the 1972 offensive. In sharp contrast, the Communists have fired only about 25 artillery rounds a day thus far in 1974, while during the initial six months of the 1972 offensive they reportedly expended an average

* Communist expenditures in 1974 are obtained from daily DAO OPREP-4 reports; in 1972 from MACV's Weekly Enemy Munitions Expenditures. In addition to artillery, Communist heavy weapons include mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle.

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of 385 artillery rounds daily.** According to these figures, the Communists this year have been firing only about one artillery round in every 30 heavy weapons rounds, while in 1972 about one in every three rounds was artillery.

3. The decline in the relative share of artillery ammunition in the mix of Communist heavy weapons expenditures is directly reflected in the estimated tonnages of all types of ground ammunition fired by Communist forces. Because artillery ammunition is the heaviest in the Communists' inventory, the difference in the tonnages fired in 1974 and 1972 is much greater than the difference in total rounds. From January through November 1974 the Communists fired an estimated average of 10 tons a day, while in the period April through September 1972 an estimated 60 tons of all ground ammunition were expended daily. The table below illustrates the comparative rates of Communist expenditures in 1974 and during the 1972 offensive.

Daily Communist Ammunition Expenditures
in South Vietnam, 1972 and 1974

Period	mortar, rocket, recoilless rifle (rounds)	artillery (rounds)	total heavy weapons (rounds)	total ammunition (tons)
Apr-Sep 1972	730	385	1,115	60
Jan-Nov 1974	680	25	705	10

4. The relatively low percentage of artillery expenditures in 1974 did not change during the surge in combat activity in July, August, and September. During these three months Communist forces expended artillery at an average rate of 40 rounds a day, while firing mortars, rockets, and recoilless rifles at the rate of 1,170 rounds daily -- still equivalent to about one artillery round in every 30 rounds of heavy weapons expended. In contrast, during the period July through September 1972 -- the peak three-month expenditures level that year -- the Communists fired an average of 540 artillery and 910 mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle rounds daily; a little more than one artillery in every three heavy weapons rounds. The following table summarizes these expenditures.

** Communist artillery expenditures include rounds from 75-mm, 85-mm, 100-mm, 105-mm, 122-mm, 130-mm, and 155-mm artillery weapons.

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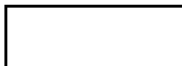
Daily Communist Ammunition Expenditures
July through September, 1972 and 1974

Period	mortar, rocket, recoilless rifle	artillery	total heavy weapons	% artillery
Jul-Sep 1972	910	540	1,450	37%
Jul-Sep 1974	1,170	40	1,210	3.3%

5. The Communists' decision to keep their artillery guns under wraps apparently is based on a combination of considerations. The overriding factor probably is that the Communists' limited military objectives thus far in the cease-fire period have required greater use of lighter and shorter range weapons. Use of lighter weapons may also be more consistent with the Communists' intention to appear to be operating within the confines of the cease-fire agreement. In addition, the conservation of artillery probably is linked to the Communists' timetable for completion of training in artillery and combined arms use now being conducted in North Vietnam and in some areas of South Vietnam.

6. Nonetheless, the obvious implication -- considering the Communists' massive ammunition stockpiles and their low artillery consumption rate -- is that the North Vietnamese are saving their artillery for use at a later date. If the artillery is finally unleashed on a countrywide basis, the intensity of Communist shellings would be far greater than that observed thus far in 1974, and probably even greater than the heavy barrages received in 1972. This intensive use of firepower could be critical, particularly considering the Communists' ability to exert heavy pressure on ARVN forces this year without it.

7. A corollary to this analysis is that a marked increase in the share of artillery ammunition in the mix of Communist heavy weapons expenditures probably will signal that a major Communist escalation of combat activity has begun or is imminent. Moreover, because Communist artillery -- in particular the 122-mm and 130-mm weapons -- has been used so sparingly recently, a significant rise in its use even without other signs of large-scale infantry attacks should be viewed as an ominous indicator.



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